



Professional Challenge Practitioner Briefing

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Introduction

Sometimes there are professional differences, concerns or disagreements in relation to safeguarding practice. Professional challenge could arise in a number of areas of multi-agency working as well as within single agency working. All agencies should promote a culture which encourages constructive challenge. It is most likely to arise in relation to criteria for referrals, outcomes of assessments, roles and responsibilities of workers, service provision, timeliness of interventions, information sharing and communication.

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Why is Professional Challenge important?

Professional challenge is a valuable tool for safeguarding, the core purpose is to ensure the safety and well-being of the child or adult at risk, by identifying and addressing potential shortcomings in safeguarding practice. Professional challenge aims to ensure that the best possible outcomes are achieved for individuals and that safeguarding decisions and actions are robust and effective. Many Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Safeguarding Adults Reviews, including several reviews held in Darlington, identify a reluctance to challenge interagency decision-making or escalate concerns, potentially leading to missed opportunities to safeguard individuals.

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Things to remember

- ⇒ Professional challenge can help find better ways to improve outcomes for children, adults and their families.
- ⇒ Expect to be challenged
- ⇒ As a professional you are responsible for your own cases and actions
- ⇒ Differences should be resolved, swiftly and you should respect the views of others

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What can I do?

Be professionally braver – you should not feel afraid to challenge any practitioners including those you view as more senior to you

Be bold in your professional approach and challenge in a constructive and non-threatening way

Use assertion to ask the questions you are thinking, no matter how silly you may think they are

Having a **clear rationale** behind your thoughts or actions

Can you **verify and validate** the decision of you and your organisation?

Enquire further if you are still unsure.

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What is Professional Challenge?

Professional challenge in safeguarding refers to the process where practitioners from different agencies or within the same agency constructively question decisions or practices that may not adequately protect a child or adult at risk. If you feel that a practitioner, or an agency, is not acting in the best interests of the child or family or adult, you have a responsibility to respectfully challenge the practitioner whatever their job role or agency and escalate that concern if resolution is not achieved. Professional challenge is a crucial aspect of effective multi-agency working and should be seen as a sign of a healthy, well-functioning partnership, not a personal criticism of the persons professional capabilities.

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How to Manage Professional Challenge:

Open communication - Open communication, respectful dialogue, and clear procedures are essential for managing disagreements and achieving positive outcomes for those at risk. Disagreements should be addressed openly and honestly, calmly, diplomatically, respectfully.

Focus on the child/adult - Practitioners should keep the needs and best interests of the individual at the forefront of their discussions, not taking information on face value. The safety of the child or adult always takes precedence over the professional challenge process and at no time must professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the child or adult is safeguarded.

Consider alternative perspectives – it is important to utilise your gut instinct and be reflective, listen respectfully to differing viewpoints and consider alternative approaches. Be confident, clear, factual and polite.

Responsibility – always be prepared to review decisions and plans with an open mind and revise decisions in light of new information

Document disagreements - record the details of the challenge, the discussions, and any agreed-upon actions.

Escalate if needed - if a resolution cannot be reached, the issue should be escalated to line managers or designated safeguarding leads.

Support, training and access to supervision - providing practitioners with the necessary support, training and access to supervision to effectively engage in professional challenge is essential for high-quality safeguarding practice.

Information about resolving professional disagreements including how to escalate through each tier of management is available in the [Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Professional Challenge Procedure](#). This Procedure outlines the formal escalation process and the stages to be followed. If disagreements cannot be resolved at the highest level of management, the matter will be referred to the DSP Independent Scrutineer for resolution.